

# Geronofat and Palestinian reservations

**W**HEN A MORE POWERFUL culture takes charge — as has happened repeatedly of course throughout history — natives rarely accept the realities of their fate without protest. And such protest, oftentimes, quickly become violent. And such violence, oftentimes, is called "terrorism" by the more dominant society that is determined to take over.

Oftentimes as well such protests designed to fend off the encroaching culture have much the opposite result bringing about escalating repression through superior force which the more powerful culture is able to enlist in its behalf.

Those struggling to retain their lands and way of life are usually outgunned — however noble, however just, and eventually however futile their resistance. At the same time, those taking over usually find all kinds of social, legal and even spiritual ruses to justify their suppression and conquest. Eventually the "terrorists" are defeated or otherwise neutralised.

In some cases, as with the United States, eventually the more dominant society become so victorious, it can even afford to look back with guilt and remorse; though without redemption.

In contemporary history, in a few cases at least, violent protest and armed resistance has been able to push back the encroachment of the new society.

Take the situation in South Africa, for instance, where after generations of struggle against White rule, after decades of blood-letting, there is now a shift that is likely to result in Black majority rule, albeit rule that will at least in the beginning be considerably dominated by the White minority.

China is an example of a society that was able to resist the encroachment of both the West and Japan in modern times. Japan itself has made an amazing trans-

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We will not live  
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Yasser Arafat



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formation from a vanquished enemy to a resurgent nation — incorporating bits of Western culture along the way and integrating itself into the dominant Western international economy.

But in most cases in the history of the past few hundred years, the expansion of White European civilisation has been unrelenting in asserting itself culturally, economically, and politically.

The fate of the American Indians, for instance, still remains a matter of considerable guilt in the New World.

In this context the current hit movie *Geronimo* is a vivid cinematic manifestation of the White Man's "burden" in having brutally subjugate the "native Americans" as they are now termed.

And before *Geronimo*, a few years ago on the silver screen there was *The Mission*, a chilling rendition of how the cynical European business class, in coordination with the subservient Catholic church, destroyed the indigenous civilisation of

South America in the process of grabbing control of the riches of that continent.

It was just two years ago during the celebration of the 500th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the New World, that historians were competing to point out just how vicious was the assault of the Europeans on the native population of the Americas.

Today, in our own time, one of history's grandest ironies is that at the very time things are moving in one direction in Southern Africa, they are moving in the very opposite direction in the holy land.

On the southern tip of the African continent the dispossession of the indigenous Black population and the attempt to corral them onto territorial "homeland" is finally being reversed. This was not inevitable — history could have taken a different turn with far more bloodshed and slaughter. Indeed, it still might.

But in the area today called Israel and Palestine, a different scenario is being played out. The September 13 handshake of Yasser Arafat on the south lawn of the American White House, the very symbol of American superpower hegemony, clearly demonstrated Palestinian capitulation.

Most telling, it was the Palestinian leader himself who had the idea of actually taking off his gun holster and handing it over to the American president in front of the entire world — while it was the Americans who understood such a gesture to be far too demonstrative and thus convinced Arafat to play his part with less theatrics and less blatantly.

Looked at in these broad historic terms, the contemporary fate of the Palestinians of the holy land is but one more episode in the ongoing saga of Western suppression of native populations. For some decades now they have been rounded up, relegated to places

called refugee camps and prisons. In the occupied territories their cities have been surrounded. In the Gaza Strip they have been reduced to ghetto existence.

True enough, in the case of the Jews versus the Palestinians there are considerable *sui generis* factors — the holocaust, the religious dimensions of Zionism, the fragmentation and balkanisation of the Arab World, the hegemonic ambitions of the West in the region because of oil and more recently the petrodollars oil has created.

Nevertheless, stripped of all the daily details, removed from the blinding limitations on historical perspective imposed by a preoccupation with current events, the broadest picture is that of Palestinian subservience to a dominating European civilisation financed and encouraged and pushed forward by the American empire. While the Blacks of South Africa will be reemerging in their own society, a solitary state based on secular values, the Palestinians enjoy no such turn in their own fate. For them the future is to see their cities and ghettos increasingly turned into reservations and bantustans in a system of Mid-east apartheid based not on colour but on a unique combination of Western colonisation and religious heritage.

Arafat, a modern-day Geronimo if you will, occasionally bursts out with expressions that "we Palestinians are not Red Indians", "we Palestinians will not live on bantustans". It would take quite some political psychiatrist to delve into Arafat's mental pathways and psychological complexities. Still, one can conclude that Arafat occasionally lashes out with these concepts precisely because he is aware of their relevance, precisely because his hope deflect their use by his enemies, precisely because having surrendered he continues to want to pretend he is still leading his people to something else.